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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001152

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [LI](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH ECOWAS EXECSEC, DISCUSSES  
LIBERIA AND CHARLES TAYLOR

REF: A. ABUJA 1142

[B](#). 2003 ABUJA 1649

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5. (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: June 28, Ambassador Campbell called on ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas. Chambas believed the political process in Liberia was on track and thought the continued engagement of the ECOWAS Secretariat and member states would keep the process moving in the right direction. Chambas did not think Charles Taylor posed much of a threat to Liberian stability from his Nigerian exile and, while he admitted Taylor would some day have to pay for his horrific crimes, Chambas was in no hurry to bring him before the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Chambas proposed that the next meeting of the Liberian contact group take place in Washington in September just prior to the beginning of the UNGA. ECOWAS Principal Program Officer for Communications Sonny Ugoh and POLOFF (note taker) also took part in the meeting. END SUMMARY.

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LIBERIA: POLITICAL PROCESS ON TRACK  
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[2](#). (C) Taking the first opportunity after presenting his credentials to President Obasanjo on June 25 (REF A), Ambassador Campbell met with ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas on June 28. Turning first to Liberia, Chambas said the political process was "on track" and the continued ECOWAS engagement would keep the process moving in the right direction. Emphasizing the need for continued engagement, Chambas said ECOWAS mediator and former Nigerian head of state General Abdulsalami Abubakar would travel to Monrovia after the July African Union meeting in Addis Ababa. Abubakar would probably be joined in Monrovia by Nigerian Foreign Minister Adeniji and Ghanaian Foreign Minister Akufor-Addo.

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CHARLES TAYLOR NOT MUCH OF A THREAT  
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[3](#). (C) In keeping with statements he has made to us previously (REF B), Chambas said he did not think former President Charles Taylor posed a significant threat to Liberian stability. Chambas acknowledged the international community's concern that Taylor be tried sooner rather than later. However, he believed Taylor had been "bottled up" in Calabar and thought it best that he be left there until the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone had attained the capacity to deal with him. He believed that sending Taylor to the SCSL at this time might distract the GOL, GOSL and the international community from the more important task of achieving stability in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Admitting that he was willing to wait some time for Taylor to be brought to justice, Chambas said, "It might take five to ten years for Taylor's past to catch up with him, but it eventually will."

[4](#). (C) Chambas noted that Taylor was responsible for the deaths of many Nigerians in Liberia and Sierra Leone and commented that most Nigerian officials with whom he has spoken loathe Taylor's presence in Calabar. Despite all of this, Nigeria had accepted Taylor in order to bring an end to the bloodshed in Liberia. Pushing the GON to hand over Taylor before it is ready might be a slap against the Nigerians' pride after they had gone to such trouble to get Taylor out of Liberia.

[5](#). (C) In a seeming contradiction to his willingness to wait for Taylor to be tried, Chambas said the SCSL needed to move through its docket of those already indicted quickly and said he "dreaded" the possibility of the SCSL not completing its work before UNAMSIL's mandate expires. Chambas had little confidence in the GOSL's ability to contain possible sources of disruption should the SCSL be unable to complete its task before UNAMSIL draws down.

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TURNING TO COTE D'IVOIRE  
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[6](#). (C) Briefly discussing Cote d'Ivoire, Chambas said that a complicating factor was the number of Liberians and Sierra

Leonians who had ended up there. He implied that at least some had gone in search of work as mercenaries. ECOWAS was involved in the search for peace and security in the region and he thought we had an opportunity to make real progress towards long term stability if the political and DDR processes in CDI were successful.

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COMMENT

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17. (C) Chambas' comments regarding Taylor were in line with statements he had made to us previously. In the absence of convincing evidence of Taylor's serious disruption of the political process in Liberia, Chambas would prefer to leave him "bottled up" in Calabar until an elected Liberian government is capable of dealing with him.  
CAMPBELL